

Khetri Maharaja's Boon-Born Babe

SWAMI EKATMANANDA

The contact of a great soul like Swami Vivekananda with the Maharaja of Khetri filled the heart of the latter with devotion to God leading to his becoming a disciple. The Maharaja was soon blessed with a son—one who proved to be highly gifted though, unfortunately, short-lived. This article by Swami Ekatananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, reveals the noble qualities of the son, who later ascended to the throne.

When all arrangements for Swami Vivekananda's sailing to North America on 31 May 1893 for his participation at Chicago in the World's Parliament of Religions, to be held there a few months later, were being made, Munshi Jagmohanlal, the Private Secretary to the Maharaja of Khetri, appeared on the scene and stopped the plan for the time being. '...the Khetri Rajaji was very, very anxious to see me and had sent his Private Secretary to Madras; and so I was bound to leave for Khetri,' wrote¹ Swamiji on 28 April 1893 to Haridas Viharidas Desai, the Dewan of Junagadh.

About two years earlier, Swamiji was the State-guest at the palace of the Khetri Maharaja. After the Maharaja's marriage to Champavati of Jodhpur in 1876 the couple had only two daughters, Suryakumari (b. 1879) and Chandrakumari (b. 1888) but no heir (male issue) to the ancient Raj of Khetri. The Raja felt greatly dejected as he had no son to succeed him to the throne. In fact, his close well-wishers had urged him to go in for a second marriage solely on this account but he had politely brushed aside all persuasion. The Maharaja therefore prayed to Swamiji to bless him so that a son may be born to him. Swamiji, noting the Raja's anxiety in the matter, bestowed on his royal

disciple his benediction accordingly.

Now that a son was born, the Raja in his excitement and joy sent his Private Secretary to Madras to get Swamiji, his Guru, for the festivities. Arriving at Madras and learning that Swamiji was living at Mr. Manmatha Bhattacharya's house, Jagmohanlal hurried there. Even as he was anxious to meet Swamiji, the latter was surprised to see him so unexpectedly and asked what brought him that far away, when Jagmohanlal explained. Swamiji quipped that every preparation being under way for his embarkation to the U.S.A. only a month later, how could he go to Khetri just then. The messenger persisted saying that even if be for just a day, Swamiji must accompany him to Khetri and that the Maharaja himself would see to the proper arrangement made for his going to the West. Finally, Swamiji agreed. On the way to Khetri Swamiji stopped at Vapingana,* Bombay and Jaipur.

Swamiji arrived at Khetri late evening when the palace was *en fête* and lit up

* Despite my herculean endeavour, the location of Vapingana still eludes me. Unless Vapingana was of some great importance, Swamiji who was in a hurry to reach Khetri and return to Bombay in order to sail on his mission, would not have cared to halt there. However, from a recent enlightening source I presume that it is possible that Vapingana could have been 'Wapigaon' in the Paithan

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 8, p. 293.

resplendently. Indeed, the festivities had commenced three or four days before, and the whole town was beautifully decorated. Singing, dancing and music were in full swing on all sides. The Maharaja was at the time in his State barge, surrounded by State-guests, some of whom were the Chiefs of Rajputana. When Jagmohanlal presented himself there with Swamiji, the Maharaja rose from his seat and prostrated himself before his Guru. All present also rose to their feet and bowed to Swamiji. The musicians sang a song of welcome as he was led to a seat of honour. Then the Maharaja formally introduced him to the assembled guests and told them how Swamiji had blessed him that a son might be born to him and also of Swamiji's decision to visit the West to preach the profound *Sanatana Dharma*. At this the whole assembly cheered. The barely three-month old babe was brought in to be blessed by Swamiji.

Very few people may know what happened to that uncommon boon-born babe. In this article is presented, therefore, a brief biography of that son of Maharaja Ajit Singh of Khetri.

The third and the last child Jai Singh of Raja Ajit Singh Bahadur was born at Agra on 27 January 1893. The joy of the parents, the subjects of Khetri and the well-wishers and friends of the Raj elsewhere knew no bounds. After several weeks, a special celebration to commemorate the happy occasion fittingly with great rejoicing was organized at Khetri. Shekhavati had never seen such a grand and prolonged celebration. Maharaja Ajit Singh liberally rewarded the distinguishing guests, the most august of whom was of course Swami Vivekananda. Prisoners were released and an outstanding

tax of over a lakh of rupees was written off.

Even as an infant Rajkumar Jai Singh's health was not good. As he grew up to the age of five, his schooling started. On his reaching the sixth standard, the Maharaja established a sort of a private hostel in the palace for some fifty children of the same average age in order to give education and suitable company to his beloved son, and hoped to hand over later the State administration to the young Rajkumar, himself betaking subsequently to a life of renunciation. However, by the will of Providence, Raja Ajit Singh Bahadur suddenly expired at Agra on 18 January 1901, even before his son Jai Singh turned a youth. Soon after, at the tender age of eight years, Jai Singh succeeded to the throne of Khetri, the sad news of his father's death having been studiously withheld from him till his ascension. But the precocious prince understood it all before long. After a short period, Raja Jai Singh Bahadur, accompanied by his mother Rajmata Champavati Sahiba and some officials of the State, went to Jaipur for the customary mourning in which, among others, the Maharaja of Jaipur and also the British Resident offered their deep condolences to the bereaved souls.

Now the official business of Khetri was conducted by Pandit Gopinathji, an old minister of the late Raja Sahib, at the instance of Rajmata Champavati. Ill health cut short his tenure and the British Resident took over as Supervisor. Later, till Raja Jai Singh Bahadur turned legally of age, Pandit Shivnath Chak, a retired government official from Madhya Pradesh, remained a *Mumsarim* (Manager) by appointment.

Raja Sahib Jai Singh was under the tutorage of Pandit Shankarlal, the Superintendent of Khetri Education Department. Besides general education, he had training in horse-riding as well as in sports and games, and later made a mark in shooting. Subsequently, Pandit Chandradhar Sharma Gulari took over the tutelary of Raja Jai Singh

Taluk of Aurangabad district of former Hyderabad State (1931 Census Report); and as Paithan (Pratishthanpura) is an historically important place, Swamiji may have wanted to peep into Vapingana.

who now (in July 1904) joined the Mayo College at Ajmer, his maternal uncle taking care of him. Pandit Gulari proudly certified to Jai Singh's studious habits, exemplary behaviour and very cordial relations with the staff and students of the college.

Once, traditionally dressed with a sword in his hand, Raja Jai Singh met the Agent for the Governor General of Rajputana, who observantly remarked, 'Raja Sahib, this age is not of that (sword) but of this (showing his pen), and you should be proficient to handle it.' Pat was the reply by Jai Singh: 'Indeed, both are essential to us!' In 1905 he dedicated the Ajit Singh Hospital in memory of his late lamented father. Three years later, he was ceremonially invested with the sacred thread (*Yajnopavita*). Unfortunately for him, his very dear mother Rajmata Champavati died in May 1908 with symptoms of TB, and now at fifteen years of age he was left without both parents. But the young Raja endured the calamity with courage and a cool head, coupled with surprising wisdom, and astonishingly consoled one and all who came to console him. In addition, he strictly adhered to the prescribed severe austerity during the mourning period.

A distinct change came over him after the sad demise of his mother Rajmata Champavati. He would surprisingly talk of *Bhakti*, *Vairagya* and *Jnana* as a mature man. An ardent lover of Sanskrit, he had already got by heart a number of slokas from Bhartrihari's *Neeti Shatakam* and *Vairagya Shatakam*, and quoted from them quite often. People off and on heard him tell, 'This world is a mere dream, full of pain. The remembrance of God alone yields lasting bliss. Hence one should not get attached to the world. How I wish to retire to the Himalayas and meditate on God on the bank of the sacred Ganga and remain immersed in bliss!' His regular prayer, expressions on the vanity of the world, and the talk of a detached life—in short, his apparently excessive bent towards

purely spiritual life not only amazed but also alarmed his servants and both his sisters and his scholar-mentor Pandit Gulari, too. They wondered if he could have been an enlightened soul in his previous birth and had come again ordained by God, for, otherwise, how could he, while so young, develop such an intense leaning towards spirituality, preoccupied apparently as he was with his college studies. Strangely he never talked about his marriage and allied matters. But, he evinced a passionate thirst for acquiring higher knowledge.

During 1909–10, he made a tour of Khetri in order to know his subjects and their woes, if any. Proud of his motherland and of his Rajput wardrobe, he kept himself out of undesirable and harmful tendencies such as taking to tobacco or alcohol. Nay, he would exhort his classmates and friends to take the vow of leading a pure life. Later, when Jai Singh was to receive the Diploma on the meritoriously successful completion of his education at the Mayo College, he had developed a bad whooping cough which regrettably gave proof of advancing TB. Soon brought from Ajmer to Jaipur, despite expert medical care, young Raja Jai Singh Bahadur fell prematurely a prey to the disease which had aggravated beyond control and remedy at the close of March 1910, and thus ended a precious and rare life.

During his last days on this earth, Raja Jai Singh bequeathed Rs. 50,000/- for charity, which money was later utilized for enlarging the Jai Singh High School at Khetri.

Reasonably the whole of Khetri plunged, as it were, into darkness. Touching comments flowed from the journals of the day to the effect:

The thought of the untimely passing away of such a virtuous, promising and educated royal youth, whose unassuming nature and love for the country, its hoary heritage and its people is worthy of emulation, is poignantly painful.

In memory of the deceased young Raja, a tablet was erected by his sorrowing friends at the Jaipur House of the Mayo College, which read:

In memory of
the late Raja Jai Singh Bahadur of Khetri
who joined the Mayo College
in July 1904 and
gave promise of a very brilliant career
and a life of useful public service but
passed away at Jaipur on
the 30th March 1910 at the age of 17 years.
Born: 27th January 1893.
Died: 30th March 1910.

A devout soul with reverence towards saintly persons, the late Raja Jai Singh Bahadur had expressed, a few weeks prior to breathing his last, a desire to see Swami Atmananda Swayamprakash Saraswatiji for whom he had great love and veneration. When the saint arrived a day earlier to his passing away, Jai Singh wanted that he sit by his bed-side and read some *slokas* from *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita*. Listening attentively

with a placid and calm countenance, he sought clarification of a few of the *slokas*. Even as he heard the words of the saint, his soul departed leaving the body dead. Tears trickled down the eyes of Swami Atmanandaji who was well known for his spiritual attainments. He spoke out, 'I, an ascetic, who have relinquished all earthly relationship, am moved by his spiritual fervour, love and reverence. I do not remember any other occasion when tears came to my eyes. Indeed, he was an illumined soul.'

At the Jaipur crematorium, where Jai Singh's mortal frame was confined to the fire, a big and magnificent *Chhatra* (umbrella) was constructed and under it regular Shiva Puja was inaugurated.

Does not the extraordinary life of Jai Singh prove the Vivekananda touch and also remind us of the Pauranic tradition of couples who pant and pray for a male offspring, and given the choice between a very good but short-lived one and several mediocre children of much longer life, select the former? □